

Secrets of the world's most loveable little alien

QUEENSLAND is just four days from invasion by E.T., the most lovable little money-spinner ever invented.

The Steven Spielberg movie is set to smash every box office record in the world — and guarantee bumper profits for the paper hankie makers. The story of a little space creature stranded on Earth has even dumbfounded the video pirates. Their shoddy copies of the film, released in America in June, have only whetted viewers' appetites to see him in his best light — on the big screen.

But how was a lump of glass fibre and rubber turned into the most touching, vulnerable screen superstar ever?

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial is, in fact, three separate models designed and built for \$1.8 million by Carlo Rambaldi.

Sculptor

The 57-year-old artist and sculptor, who left his native Italy for Hollywood six years ago, has won Oscars for his previous film creations, King Kong and Alien.

He asked for nine months to make E.T. — and was given six.

He and his four staff worked 20 hours a day, sometimes seven days a week to design and build the E.T.s.

JEAN RITCHIE reports on the E.T. phenomenon

One was mechanical, operated by cables.

One was an electronic model for fine facial movements — E.T.'s bulging eyes close like a reptile's, with the bottom lid moving up to meet the top lid.

The third was a model used for walking scenes, operated by a person inside.

All the E.T.s were aluminium and steel skeletons covered by glass fibre, polyurethane and rubber.

In the mechanical and electronic models there were 85 different controls, covering everything from raising an arm to blinking an eye.

E.T.'s head is actually 30 years old. It was based on a painting Rambaldi did in his 20s.

But the eyes are a new addition. Spielberg says they are based on those of Albert Einstein and Ernest Hemingway.

Rambaldi, who designed them, says they were

inspired by his Himalayan mountain cat.

Spielberg can take credit for another part of E.T.'s anatomy.

Rambaldi says: "Steven looked at a clay model and asked me to make the rear end more like Donald Duck's. We did it."

Three very special actors brought E.T. to life — and none of them was more than 1m tall.

Pat Bilou, 34, a dwarf who used to work in a sheriff's office in Ohio, was the main E.T. actor.

He sweltered inside the costume for hours — with the head off and blow driers cooling him between takes.

"It was like a steam bath in there," he said.

The costume's weight gave the 86cm actor back pains, and that gave little Tamara de Treau, 22 and 76.5cm tall, her big chance. She stepped in to do one scene at the end of the film.

Tamara, known as

Tammy, is an actress and singer from San Francisco.

"I just climbed into the costume," she says. "There was nothing very technical to it. It was a tight fit and it was certainly warm in there."

But because the film is such a runaway success Tammy's career has picked up.

"Everyone now regards me as a legitimate actor," she says. "Crazy, isn't it?"

Waddle

Schoolboy Matthew de Meritt, 12, born without legs, enjoyed his involvement with the film and caused quite a stir by skateboarding around the set.

Inside the costume he walked on his hands — giving E.T. a woozy waddle for a drunken scene where the little creature is knocked over by a fridge door.

Finding the right team to fill the costume was only one of Spielberg's headaches.



Three models of E.T. were made to capture the little creature's movements.

He also had to find a voice for E.T. He had practically settled on an 82-year-old Tibetan woman when his sound director heard housewife Pat Welsh placing an order in his local shop.

Pat's voice, croaky from the 40 cigarettes she puffs a day, was just what he was looking for.

Pat, a former speech teacher in her 60s, spent nine and a half hours dubbing her voice onto the film.

The result pleased

everyone, including Pat — though she earned less than \$400 for her part in the money-making monster.

E.T. has a lot of hearts — a dozen of them in fact. That was Steven Spielberg's description of the 12 men it took to work the 100cm model.

Heart

They put the creature through 150 movements. One operated his red-glowing heart and others made his nose wrinkle, his neck extend, his fingers bend.

Each operator stood at a control box connected

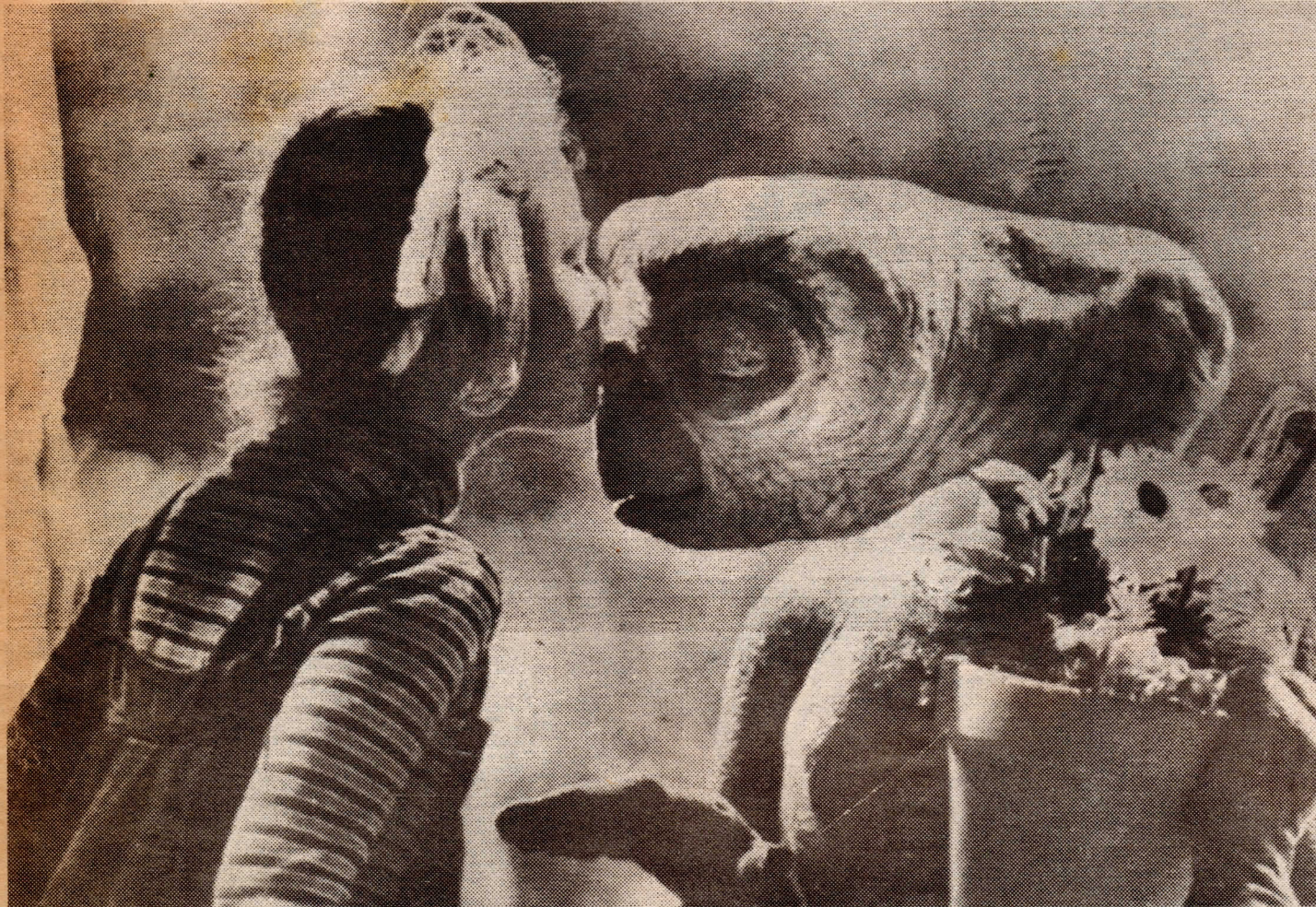
to the mechanical model by 6m cables.

Between scenes they practised by making E.T. wink and pinch the bottoms of girls on the set.

They scared the life out of a make-up man spraying E.T.'s skin to keep it wet looking. Forgetting for a moment he was dealing with a model, he said: "Turn your head," and E.T. obliged.

"It was very difficult to think of him as a model," said one of his operators.

"He may not be quite human, but we were all convinced he had a life of his own, even though we were pushing the buttons."



E.T. captures another heart... a scene from the movie.



Director Steven Spielberg, who made E.T. almost human.

Tomorrow: Five E.T. BMX bikes to be won